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FRANK FRAZETTA FANTASY ILLUSTRATED

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A Letter From The Publishers

We hope everyone enjoyed issue #2. It was a gratifying project for all involved. This third issue features contributions of stories from our first two issues as well as new creations from fantasy legends Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess. Inside you will find the conclusion of Richard Carben's *Shadows in the Mistland* the second installment of Joe Juska's post-apocalyptic *Hell Riders*, both of which debuted in our first issue. Continued from our previous issue are The (Mis)adventures of the *Brothers* told in *The Emerald Seven* and two very distinct Elia Levine tales painted by Italian artist Alex Horley and comic version Tom Grubb. Featured for the first time are Charles Vess and Neil Gaiman. Charles shows us a new technique integrating text, graphics and full color art while Neil weaves a classic fantasy tale illustrated by popular comic artist Tony Daniel. Last but certainly not least, Peter Anthony provides us with a sneak peek of his upcoming novel *Zombie Tower*.

This summer is filled with travel as our editorial staff flies to various conventions to meet and greet our readers and discover new talent to fill future issues. The schedule includes stops in Charlotte (Heroes Convention), Chicago (Wizard World), San Diego (Comic-Con International) and winds up in Atlanta with DragonCon. Stop by our booth and tell us what you like. Next year the publishing schedule changes from quarterly to bimonthly. We'd like to hear your suggestions for FFI features in 1999.

The Winter issue will be on sale in November featuring contributions from this issue as well as all new styles and artistic styles. Continued are the two exploring Elia Levine creations as well as Joe Juska's terrifying *Hellriders*. This issue also marks the debut of a chilling new *GI Joe* tale from Wendy Hall, an interesting story of a promise claim world from Daren Bader and a cutting edge 3D Graphics approach to art contributed by U.K. artist Steve Stone. Most importantly, we're honored to feature engagingly Frank Frazetta's most acclaimed and talked about piece on the cover. Don't Dorian. As always, thanks to Frank for setting the standard by which all fantasy art is measured.

Great to see everyone that stopped by to see us at MegaCon this March in Orlando. Here we are along with artist David Mack (far left, creator of *Kabuki*).

FRANK FRAZETTA FANTASY ILLUSTRATED

Fall 1998 • Volume 1, Number 3

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Frank Frazetta
"The Huntress"

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FRANK FRAZETTA'S "The Huntress"

The Huntress is quintessential Frazetta and illustrates why the name of Frazetta has a worldwide reputation. Erotic women and savage jungle cats are instantly recognizable signature themes present throughout Frazetta's career. Frank has a deep affinity for the female form and wild animals of all types; his work in these areas is unsurpassed. His women are frankly sensuous, challenging, and supremely bold in their physicality; none of the vapid, pretty-girl cuteness seen in countless pin-up artists. Frazetta's depiction of the sabre-tooths focuses on the vital energies of the cats, their movement, and explosive potential for spontaneous violent action. We see none of the cold, overworked detail present in those wildlife artists who visually kill the animals they paint.

The Huntress was originally conceived as a cover for *Savage Pellucidar* by E.R. Burroughs. Early sketches give an insight into the decisions Frazetta made. An early idea shows the female and cats turning to see a pterodactyl flying overhead. Another concept depicts two passive cats with a third cat roaring in the background. Frazetta also considered a rear perspective focusing on the female posterior. This was rejected as too provocative. The final image is simple, powerful, and compositionally perfect. Frazetta comments on this painting: "I really did love this painting. It's very simplified, with an interesting silhouette. Roy Krenkel used to call this a 'clump.' But it does have a beautiful design and dynamic movement. The cats are nicely done. It's a nice idea and I think I pulled it off quite well."

Frazetta decided to eliminate all the background details so as to concentrate the energy into an in-your-face ferocity. The sabre-tooth cats have highly expressive paws and faces placed in a counterbalancing rhythm, a dynamic symmetry that energizes the design. The piece also exhibits a narrative suggestiveness - what's happening? Are the cats attacking or defending? The cats are also creative metaphors - Frazetta's comment on female nature.

Frazetta has told me many times that the great sin of art is to be boring. True art is a living thing; it lives. Great art evokes emotion and intellectual response. Frazetta has achieved this time and again. The Huntress is a sublime work of emotion, intellect and style.

Dr. David Winiewicz





DEEP IN THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH,
A KING RECLINES IN HIS THRONE. WINE,
WOMEN AND FINE FOOD DO LITTLE TO
SATISFY THE GLUTTONOUS APPETITES
OF A CALCULATING CONQUEROR.

LORD VICK BECOMES RESTLESS AS
HIS COUNCIL MEMBERS INDULGE.

I TAKE IT ORRUS
IS AWAKENING HIMSELF
SOMEWHERE ELSE
TONIGHT?

INFERNUS TERRA (PART III)

WRITTEN BY ELLI LEONE
DRAWN BY ALEX MCKLEY
PAINTED BY DANNY ORRIS

Forley + Stanley 998



AND DREAM OF MY
DEATH. THE ABANDON
WITH A FLAME FOR THE
DRAMATIC FINALLY
EMERGES MY SCORCH.



HOW
TELL ME... WHO
HAVE YOU SOILED
MY GUARDIAN WITH
AN INFERNAL?



THIS LOWLY
CREATURE HAS
SOMETHING HE
WISHES TO
SHARD.



SPEAK QUICKLY
IF TIME IS SHORT,
AND YOUR SMILE
IS BECOMING TO
ENJOYST ME.



I, I CAN
TWO WERE'S STORM
THE WOODS PASSAGE
THEY WOULD ALL OF
THE GUARDS - THEN
THE YOUNG MAN
CONSIDERABLY
DRILLED THE TRACT
TO OUTMANEUVER



WHICH
ONE OF
YOU WOULD BE
RESPONSIBLE FOR
THIS INCALCULABLE
BREACH OF
SECURITY?



IT WAS
LORD.

YES,
GIVE US TO
BLAME.

SO-O-UT MY
LORD, I STAFFED
THE GROUND WITH
MY BEST MEN, AN
ARRAULT BY TWO
MEN COULD NOT
SUCCEED!



YOU
INCOMPETENT
FOOL!



I THINK
YOU KNOW
WHAT TO DO. FIND
THIS FISH AND
BRING ME HIS
HEAD!



ORIS APPROACHED THE WISAGED
OPENING EAGER TO APPREHEND HIS
LORD AND ENGAGE HIS PREY



I ENJOY
MY LITTLE TRIPS
TO THE
OUTSIDE











A FEW HOURS LATER CORPUS
EMERGES FROM HIS LONG ASCENT

RED EYES ABLAZE, WITHIN LIES A GATE...
CHILLING TO THE SOUL

DEATH IS THE NAME, HIS FINGERS DWELL...
LIFE IS THE TOLL



HAS THERE
BEEN ANOTHER
WARRIOR TO
PASS THIS
WAD?

TAKE IT EASY MAN!
THEY GUSTED A DUDE
LOOKED JUST LIKE YOU
LOOKED HIM UP IN THE
JAIL DOWN THE STREET



DRESSED
TO KILL



SAME TIME, SAME EVENING.
BACK AT THE EARTHQUAKE RESEARCH
CENTER IN NORTHEAST CALIFORNIA.

HEY STEVE,
I'VE BEEN STAGING
AT THIS SCREEN FOR
TWO DAYS. HOW
ABOUT TAKING
ONE?

NO PROBLEM.
AFTER THIS NEXT
CUP O' JOE I'LL
BE GOOD FOR
HOURS.

SWEET JESUS!
IT'S BACK!

THIS ONE'S
READY TO BLOW
GET ON THE
MOON!

CALL THE
PROFESSOR
NOW!

WHAT'S THE
NUMBER?

HIT THE REDDIE DIAL—
BUTTON NUMBER ONE!

PROFESSOR
DINSTEIN HERE.

PROFESSOR—
IT'S STEVE. T-S-SCULDS
NOT B-S-GOING TO
BELIEVE THEM!

SLOW DOWN,
WHAT IS IT?

NORTHEAST
CALIFORNIA!
S-S-SAN FRANCISCO!
EVERYTHING'S GOING
BAH-WHERE!

RRRRRIIIIIINGGG
RRRRRIIIIIINGGG

DEEP IN THE EARTH, BENEATH ONE OF THIS CENTURY'S PRISTINE CITIES, AN UNWILY TYRANT IS ABOUT TO REALIZE ONE OF HIS GREAT ASPIRATIONS.

CAPTAIN, THE FOURTH FLOOR IS UPON US. I PRESUME ALL PREPARATIONS ARE COMPLETED.

YES, MY LORD. THE TUNNEL IS FINISHED & WE'VE TAPPED THE FLOOR. I SIMPLY AWAIT YOUR COMMAND.

LET THE WAREBOTTEN CITY SEAL MY TURY PULL!

PULL

GOO
HELP US!



OUR WORLD IS AT WAR.

TO BE CONTINUED...

TOWER OF NO

THREE WEEKS OF ARDUOUS
RIDING WITH HEART ON THE
TIE DIED AN ADVERTISED
QUEST BROUGHT TWO
WISDOM-LOVING COMPANIES
TOGETHER. NEARLY AT THE
TUCKER END OF A **PARK**
STONE SENTINEL. THEY
FEEL CALLED BY AN OLD
DEFINED SENSE OF **DEAD**

THE ORIGINAL SPONSOR
THIS WAS AN BRAVE
SOLDIERS WOULD STILL BE
ALIVE TO SERVE ME IF WE
HAD CHOSEN THE **RIGHT**
PATH. THEIR STRONG ARMS
WOULD DAMSEL TOMORROW
TOWERS DARK THREATS

WHAT'S
THAT FILE
OF STONES

SOME STRANGE
ANCIENT NOTING
CAN YOU READ IT
HARD?

I'M SURE MASTER
MIND IT APPEARS TO
BE SCATTERED
SCATCHELINGS OF A
LOST LANGUAGE FROM
AN UNKNOWN EPOCH

DANGER!

TWO COLOR
IMMENSE! NOW
YOU TAKE YOU CAN
ENACT

WITH SHOWN SHAKING
OLD TALK IT NOT
- WAIT, SAYS,
SOMETHING STAY
DUNK!

HOW DID YOU GET
HESITANT OUT OF
THAT? IT SOUNDS
LIKE FRIENDLY
HOSPITALITY TO ME



THAT
ROSEMARY IS
A BIT
SMIDGER.

WHY DON'T
YOU JUST
GO AROUND
TO THE
SIDE?

ARCHIE HONCH
LEADS THE COMPANY
FORWARD WITH HIS
EDUCATED DAUGHTER'S
AT STAKE, HE COULD
DO NOTHING ELSE.



DANNY: BOGA THE ADDRESS OF
THIEVES HAS TURNED HER BACK
ON US. THAT DAMNED MAN MUST
HAVE NERVED UP THE PLAN
THAT'S **SHAGG** AND HANDS
WITH YOUR DADDY. THEY'RE
GOT THE OTHER HUNTER OUT
NOW. I SHOULD'VE NEVER HESITED
THOSE BLITHERING IDIOTS
WASTE! THAT MAN HE WOULD
LOADS IN THOSE MATCHES
I'LL GET MY BUTT OUT OF
THIS JER YET.



THAT'S **RIGHT!** JUST WORRY
ABOUT **YOURSELF**. WHAT ABOUT
ME? YOU PROMISED WE'D HAVE DADDY'S
MONEY BE NOW AND LIVING IN LUXURY
IN CHULO DE JASTER. BUT I HAD TO
ENDURE ONE HARDSHIP AFTER ANOTHER.
THE FOOD IS ALL DRY, THE WINE IS
WATER, THE BED IS HARD. WE SHOULD
HAVE BROUGHT HANO GO. IS AT LEAST
HAVE ONE SERVANT. IT'S TAKING ALL
MY COURAGE TO PUT UP WITH THIS!

GETTING TANGLED WITH
THAT HOOLER WAS MY
SECOND MISTAKE. MY
FIRST WAS CENTERING MY
FACILLANT SOVERE IN A
SPOILED, WHEREAS NEXT WHO
WOULDN'T LIFT HER FINGER
IF THE WORLD DEPENDED ON
IT.



YOU WORTHLESS SON OF
A BITCH! YOU SCUR,
YOU PIG. I WANT TO
HONK! I DEMAND YOU
TALK ME HOME
IMMEDIATELY.





THIS ELABORATE DEMON BUILT
TOUGH CRUDES AN ANCIENT
EVIL BEYOND HUMAN
UNDERSTANDING, BUT THE
WISDOM AND FEARS THIS
FETTERED MIND COULD
SECURE THE FREEDOM OF
BEAUTIFUL WOMEN ARE
NOTHING AND WOULD BE
FORGOTTEN COULD
THIRDFOLD

SCARY
SCARY
?



EVERY PAINFUL EXPERT
IS WILL **REPAID** BY
OVER A SLIGHT
APPROXIMATE BLAME -
WHAT THAT?



BLAM!



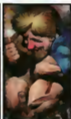
DIE! HA, HA,
HAP THE
SPEEDER! - OH!
WHERE HE GO!

**BLAM.
BA, BA.
BLAM!**



UNGH!

**B. B. B.
BAM!**







NO HIDE, IT WAS
DHUQUA'S PLAN
I JUST FIGURED IT
OUT HE HAD
HODHA HERE WHILE
HE LED YOU HERE
INTO THE DESERT

DON'T KILL
LOVE FATHER
HE'S THE
ONLY MAN I
EVER LOVED

I JUST FOLLOWED
HIS TRAIL HERE
ALONG, I FREED
HODHA, HE RETURNED
TO YOU WHEN THE
MOTTED HODHA
TRIED TO STOP US

OH, ALL RIGHT
I SHOULDN'T HAVE
THOUGHT THAT
HALLS WERE
LET'S GET OUT OF
HERE

MASTED
HODHA
HELP?

HELP, YOU
PROMISED?

OH, JUST THE
BROWN AND
WHITE
SECRET TRAIL OF

OH

WHAT'S
THAT?

KEEPING
HODHA'S FEET
EDGED
THROUGH THE
EMPTY HALLS
DHUQUA'S
BLOODING
FINGERED AHEAD



OH LOOK
WAY OF
THESE

HEY SLOTHY,
WHY DON'T YOU
LET GO?

FROM SLOTHY BOY IF
YOU LOVE ME, YOU'LL
COME ON DOWN THE
HILL

THAT'S AS DEEP
THE
DUTY IS TO GO
ME

DING HODHA
WE SHOULDN'T
TACKLE HERE

NO I WANT
TO SEE HIM
FALL





CHICK,
START THE
PUMPS!

AYE,
CAPT!

BBBBRRMMM
CHUGA-CHUGA-CHUGA

FOOM

CHOPPER!
PATCH THAT
HOLE!

HURRY!
WE'RE TACK'
ON WATER
FAST!

The Emerald Seven

Part 2

Created and
written by

Greg Hildebrandt

Tim Hildebrandt
and Greg Hildebrandt, Jr.

Edited by
Glenn Herdling

DON'T
TELL ME
WHAT TO DO,
YA LITTLE
CRAB!

WHO
YOU CALLIN'
LITTLE!

PARK OFF,
STIK' OR ILL
WELD YA!

CUT
IT OUT!
WE'RE
LOSING
TIME!





YES, MASTER
OUR SPY TELL US
THAT *NOVA* FIND
TRIFORUM.

WE CHASE
AND SHOOT HER
DOWN BUT TRIFORUM
WE NOT GET.

*YOU
BRAINLESS
IDIOTS!*

WHY DID
YOU SHOOT
THEM *DOWN*?

WHY
DIDNT YOU
LET *ME* KNOW
FIRST?

WE SORRY,
MASTER--
WE SORRY--

THEY ARE *YOURS*.
SISTER! *YOU* CREATED
THESE JUNK HEAPS!

THEY HAD THE
TRIFORUM AND
LOST IT--SHOT IT
DOWN NO LESS!

*NOW
WHAT?*

YOU WEAR
THE BRAIN-CROWN,
BROTHER! YOU TELL
ME!





MASTER, WE THINK
WE SEE *SLEEPY* FLY
WITH TRIFORUM TO
ROCK CITY!

YOU
THOUGHT
WHAT?!

THEN YOU
DIDN'T *DESTROY*
IT, BUT YOU LET
IT GET *AWAY*!

YOU STUPID
USELESS PILES
OF JUNK!

WE SORRY...

WE WILL
BE THE ONES TO
SUFFER FOR THEIR
BLUNDER, *SISTER*!

THE MASTER
WILL...

I KNOW
THAT, *BROTHER*!

BUT THIS WILL
BE THE *LAST* TIME
THEY CAUSE US
TO SUFFER!

GATHER
TOGETHER
OVER THE DRAIN,
MY CHILDREN!

BUT WE
DO GOOD
NEXT TIME.

YES, WE
DO GOOD.

YES, YES--
NEXT TIME.



NEXT
TIME?!

KRRILLOOM



MASTER!

RAHHH!!

UGHAA!!

RAHHEE!!

IF
YOU KEEP
THIS UP, WE
WON'T HAVE
AN ARMY!

DON'T
QUESTION MY
ACTIONS! THESE
STUPID MEAT-POTS
WILL ALL BE
RECYCLED!

I AM
BREEDING A
NEW GENERATION!
STRONGER!
SMARTER!

THE MASTER!

HE BECKONS!



STOP
WHIMPERING,
BROTHER!

I KNOW WHAT
NEEDS TO BE DONE!

WE'VE BEEN
SEARCHING FOR
TWENTY YEARS!

HOW DID
THAT BITCH,
NOVA, FIND THE
TRIFORUM?

BUT
FIRST...

MASTER,
IT WAS NOT
ME!

IT WAS
THE **ENFORCERS!**
THEY FAILED
YOU!

BE
QUIET, YOU
FOOL.

IT WAS
YOU WHO
FAILED
ME!

I GAVE
YOU THE
BRAIN-CROWN,
AGULSI!

KZZZAAAMM

AAAAAGGGHHH!
MASTER! NO!
PLEASE!

SHUT UP,
BROTHER!

ACCEPT YOUR
PUNISHMENT!

IF THEY
FIND OUT HOW
TO USE THE
TRIFORUM:

IT WILL
NEUTRALIZE ALL
THE QUANTUM AND
WE ARE ALL
DEAD!

PLEASE,
MASTER. ONE
MORE CHANCE!

!GASP!



FIND THE
TRIFORUM!

YES,
MASTER!

FAIL
ME--

--AND
DIE!!!

AAAGHH!!

REPAIRS
TO THE HULL
COMPLETE.
CAPN!

BUT WE
NEED TO SURFACE
TO REPAIR THE
SALS!

WE DON'T
HAVE ENOUGH
POWER TO
SURFACE!

WAIT!
I'M PICKIN' UP
SOMETHING!

TEN DEGREES
SOUTH--A LARGE
AIR MASS

...AND
MACHINES!

TURN ON
THE EXTERIOR
LIGHTS!

IF MY
FATHER'S
MAP WAS
RIGHT...

IT'S THE
HEADQUARTERS
OF THE EMERALD
SEVEN AND
MY HOME!

GOOD!

HHHHMMMMMM



WE WILL NOT
SURVIVE THE MASTERS
WRATH IF WE FAIL
AGAIN!

THIS IS NOT
A JOB FOR THE
ENFORCERS!

NO KIDDING,
BROTHER!



I MUST
INFILTRATE THE
PIRATE RANKS AT
DOCK CITY!

BY
YOURSELF?!

NO! WITH
BLACK SAGE, OUR
SLAVE MASTER AND HIS
RUTHLESS GANG!



CAN
WE TRUST
THEM?

I WILL
ACCOMPANY THEM
IN DISGUISE!

THE
TRIFORUM WILL
BE MINE!

I WANT
NOVA!

SHE WILL
HUMILIATE ME
NO LONGER!



THERE
DOCK CITY!

GET TRIFORUM
SAFE!





GOTTA
FIND.

GOTTA
GET TO
SKULL AND
FLASH
BONES!!

KRAK

SPLAT

BLEEK!

SLEECH!!

KRAK KRAK



TRIFORUM!
HIDE QUICK!

BRAIN AFTER
NOVA! HE KNOW
WE GOT IT!

WHA...



SHE
FOUND IT?!
I DON'T
BELIEVE IT!
SLEEP,
IS SHE
ALL RIGHT?

SHE
GOOD!

BE
HERE
SOON!

BOYS, WE'RE
IN BUSINESS!

NOVA FOUND
THE TRIFORUM!

SHE SAID
SHE HAD THE
MAP, BOSS!

MAN,
WHAT'S THAT
WORTH?!



WHAT IT
MATTER?

IT NOT
YOURS!

IT
NOVA'S!

BACK
OFF!

YOU
WRECKED MY
PLACE AGAIN,
BLADE!

I'LL PAY FOR
IT, SAMSON!

LOOK! NOVA
FOUND THE
TRIFORUM!



YEAH!
LUCKY US!



THAT'S
MY GIRL!

ENFORCERS
COME SOON!

THIS WILL
BE THE FIRST
PLACE THEY
CHECK!

DON'T WORRY,
IT'S IN GOOD
HANDS!

YEAH, *AREAL*
GOOD HANDS...



FATS! SKIN!
C'MON, TO
THE SHIP!

SAMSON, TELL
NOVA TO MEET ME
AT THE DOCKS!

BE
CAREFUL,
BLADE.



THEY'LL BE
SEARCHING
EVERY
SHIP!



TRUST ME,
THEY WON'T
FIND IT!

YEAH,
TRUST ME!

EEK!
SLEEP
COME WITH
YOU!

CONTINUED

The Facts in the Case of the Departure of Miss Finch

By Neil Gaiman

Illustrated by Tony Daniel

To begin at the end: I arranged the thin slice of pickled ginger, pink and translucent, on top of the pale yellowish flesh, and dipped the whole arrangement – ginger, fish and vinegared rice – into the soy sauce, flesh-side down; then I devoured it, in a couple of bites.

"I think we ought to go to the police," I said.

"And tell them what, exactly?" asked Jane.

"Well, we could file a missing persons report, or something. I don't know."

"And where did you last see the young lady?" asked Jonathan, in his most policemanlike tones. "Ah, I see. Did you know that wasting police time is normally considered an offence, sir?"

"But the whole circus..."

"These are transient persons, sir, of legal age. They come and go. If you have their names, I suppose I can take a report..."

I gloomily ate a salmon-skin roll. "Well, then," I said, "why don't we go to the papers?"

"Brilliant idea," said Jonathan, in the sort of tone of voice which indicates that the person talking doesn't think it's a brilliant idea at all.

"Jonathan's right," said Jane. "They won't listen to us."

"Why wouldn't they believe us? We're reliable. Honest citizens. All that."

"You're a fantasy writer," she said. "You make up stuff like this for a living. No-one's going to believe you."

"But you two saw it all as well. You'd back me up."

"Jonathan's got a new series on cult horror movies coming out in the autumn. They'll say he's just trying to get cheap publicity for the show. And I've got another book coming out. Same thing."

"So you're saying that we can't tell anyone?" I slipped my green tea.

"No," Jane said, reasonably, "we can tell anyone we want. It's making them believe us that's problematic. Or, if you ask me, impossible."

The pickled ginger was sharp on my tongue. "You may be right," I said. "And Miss Finch is probably much happier wherever she is right now than she would be here."

"But her name isn't Miss Finch," said Jane, "it's –" and she said our former companion's real name.

"I know. But it's what I thought when I first saw her," I explained. "Take in one of those movies. You know. When they take off their glasses and put down their hat. 'Why, Miss Finch. You're beautiful'."

"She certainly was that," said Jonathan, "in the end, anyway." And he shivered at the memory.

There. So now you know that's how it all ended, and how the three of us left it, several years ago. All that remains is the beginning, and the details.

For the record, I don't expect you to believe any of this. Not really. I'm a liar by trade, after all; albeit, I like to think, an honest liar. If I belonged to a gentleman's club I'd recount it over a glass or two of port late in the evening as the fire burned low, but I am a member of no such club, and I'll write it better than ever I'd tell it. So here you will learn of Miss Finch (whose name, as you already know, was not Finch, nor anything like it, since I'm changing names here to disguise the guilty) and how it came about that she was unable to join us for sushi. Believe it or not, just as you wish. I am not even certain that I believe it anymore. It all seems such a long way away.

I could find a dozen beginnings. Perhaps it might be best to begin in a hotel room, in London, a few years ago. It was 11.00am. The phone began to ring, which surprised me. I hurried over to answer it.

"Hello?" It was too early in the morning for any-

one in America to be phoning me, and there was no-one in England who was meant to know that I was even in the country.

"Hi," said a familiar voice, adopting an American accent of monumentally unconvincing proportions. "This is Hiram P. Muzzlebuster of Colossal Pictures. We're working on a film that's a remake of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* but instead of Nazis it has women with enormous knockers in it. We've heard that you were astonishingly well-supplied in the trouser department and might be willing to take on the part of our male lead, Minnesota Jones."

"Jonathan?" I said. "How on earth did you find me here?"

"You knew it was me," he said, aggrieved, his voice losing all trace of the improbable accent and returning to his native London.

"Well, it sounded like you," I pointed out. "Anyway, you didn't answer my question. No-one's meant to know that I was here."

"I have my ways," he said, not very mysteriously. "Listen, if Jane and I were to offer to feed you sushi - something I recall you eating in quantities that put me in mind of feeding time at London Zoo's Walrus House - and if we offered to take you to the theatre before we fed you, what would you say?"

"Not sure. I'd say 'Yes' I suppose. Or 'What's the catch?'. I might say that."

"Not exactly a catch," said Jonathan. "I wouldn't exactly call it a *catch*. Not a real catch. Not really."

"You're lying, aren't you?"

Somebody said something near the phone, and then Jonathan said "Hang on, Jane wants a word." Jane is Jonathan's wife.

"How are you?" she said.

"Fine, thanks."

"Look," she said, "You'd be doing us a tremendous favour - not that we wouldn't love to see you, because we would, but you see, there's some-

"She's your friend," said Jonathan, in the background.

"She's not my friend. I hardly know her," she said, away from the phone, and then, to me, "Um, look, there's someone we're sort of lumbered with. She's not in the country for very long, and I wound up agreeing to entertain her and look after her tomorrow night. She's pretty frightful, actually. And Jonathan heard that you were in town from someone at your film company, and we thought you might be perfect to make it all less awful, so please say yes."

So I said yes.

In retrospect, I think the whole thing might have been the fault of the late Ian Fleming, creator of James Bond. I had read an article the previous month, in which Ian Fleming had advised any would-be writer who had a book to get done that wasn't getting written to go to a hotel to write it. I had, not a novel, but a film script that wasn't getting written; so I bought a plane ticket to London, promised the film company that they'd have a finished script in three weeks' time, and took a room in an eccentric hotel in Little Venice.

I told no-one in England that I was there. Had people known, my days and nights would have been spent seeing them, not staring at a computer screen and, sometimes, writing.

Truth to tell, I was bored half out of my mind, and ready to welcome any interruption. Early the next evening I arrived at Jonathan and Jane's house, which was more or less in



Hampstead. There was a small green sports car parked outside. Up the stairs, and I knocked at the door. Jonathan answered it; he wore an impressive suit. His light-brown hair was longer than I remembered it from the last time I had seen him, in life or on television.

"Hello," said Jonathan. "The show we were going to take you to has been canceled. But we can go to something else, if that's okay with you."

I was about to point out that I didn't know what we were originally going to see, so a change of plans would make no difference to me, but Jonathan was already leading me into the living room, establishing that I wanted fizzy water to drink, assuring me that we'd still be eating sushi and that Jane would be coming downstairs as soon as she had put the children to bed.

They had just redecorated the living room, in a style Jonathan described as Moorish brothel. "It didn't set out to be a Moorish Brothel," he explained. "Or any kind of a brothel really. It was just where we ended up. The brothel look."

"Has he told you all about Miss Finch?" asked Jane. Her hair had been red the last time I had seen her. Now it was dark brown; and she curved like a Raymond Chandler smile.

"Who?"

"We were talking about Ditko's inking style," apologized Jonathan. "And the Neal Adams issues of *Jerry Lewis*."

"But she'll be here any moment. And he has to know about her before she gets here."

Jane is, by profession, a journalist, but had become a best-selling author almost by accident. She had written a companion volume to accompany a television series about two paranormal investigators, which had risen to the top of the bestseller lists and stayed there.

Jonathan had originally become famous hosting an evening talk show, and had since parlayed his gonzo charm into a variety of fields. He's the same person whether the camera is on or off, which is not always true of television folk.

"It's a kind of family obligation," Jane explained. "Well, not exactly *family*."

"She's Jane's friend," said her husband, cheerfully.

"She is *not* my friend. But I couldn't exactly say no to them, could I? And she's only in the country for a couple of days."

And who Jane could not say no to, and what the obligation was, I never was to learn, for at the moment the doorbell rang, and I found myself being introduced to Miss Finch. Which, as I have mentioned, was not her name.

She wore a black leather cap, and a black leather coat, and black, black hair, pulled tightly back into a small bun, done up with a pottery tie. She wore make-up, expertly applied to give an impression of severity that a professional dominatrix might have envied. Her lips were tight together, and she glared at the world through a pair of definite black-rimmed spectacles - they punctuated her face much too definitely to ever be mere glasses.

"So," she said, as if she were pronouncing a death sentence, "we're going to the theatre, then."

"Well, yes and no," said Jonathan. "I mean, yes, we are still going out, but we're not going to be able to see *The Romans in Britain*."

"Good," said Miss Finch. "In poor taste anyway. Why anyone would have thought that nonsense would make a musical I do not know."

"So we're going to a circus," said Jane, reassuringly. "And then we're going to eat sushi."

Miss Finch's lips tightened. "I do not approve of circuses," she said.

"There aren't any animals in this circus," said Jane.

"Good," said Miss Finch, and she sniffed. I was beginning to understand why Jane and Jonathan had wanted me along.

The rain was pattering down as we left the house, and the street was dark. We squeezed ourselves into the sports car and headed out into London. Miss Finch and I were in the back seat of the car, pressed uncomfortably close together.

Jane told Miss Finch that I was a writer, and told me that Miss Finch was a biologist.

"Biogeologist actually," Miss Finch corrected her. "Were you serious about eating sushu, Jonathan?"

"Er, yes. Why? Don't you like sushu?"

"Oh, I'll eat *my* food cooked," she said, and began to list for us all the various flakes, worms and parasites that lurk in the flesh of fish and which are only killed by cooking. She told us of their life cycles while the rain pelted down, slicking night-time London into garish neon colours. Jane shot me a sympathetic glance from the passenger seat, then she and Jonathan went back to scrutinising a handwritten set of directions to wherever we were going. We crossed the Thames at London Bridge while Miss Finch lectured us about blindness, madness and liver failure; and she was just elaborating on the symptoms of elephantiasis as proudly as if she had invented them herself, when we pulled up in a small back street in the neighbourhood of Southwark Cathedral.

"So where's the circus?" I asked.

"Somewhere around here," said Jonathan. "They contacted us about being on the Christmas special. I tried to pay for tonight's show, but they insisted on comping us in."

"I'm sure it will be fun," said Jane, hopefully.

Miss Finch snuffed.

A fat, bald man, dressed as a monk, ran down the pavement toward us. "There you are!" he said. "I've been keeping an eye out for you. You're late. It'll be starting in a moment." He turned around and scampered back the way he had come, and we followed him. The rain splashed on his bald head and ran down his face, turning his Fester Addams make-up into streaks of white and brown. He pushed open a door in the side of a wall.

"In here."

We went in. There were about fifty people in there already, dripping and steaming, while a tall woman in bad vampire make-up holding a flashlight walked around checking tickets, tearing off stubs, selling tickets to anyone





A train rattled by above us.

We shuffled forward, led by Uncle Fester and the Vampire woman, into a sort of a holding pen where we stood and waited.

"I hope we're going to be able to sit down after this," said Miss Funch.

When we were all settled the flashlights went out, and the spotlights went on.

The people came out. Some of them rode motor-bikes and dune buggies. They ran and they laughed and they swung and they cackled. Whoever had dressed them had been reading too many comics, I thought, or watched *Mad Max* too many times. There were punks and nuns and vampires and monsters and strippers and the living dead.

They danced and capered around us while the Ringmaster - identifiable by his top hat - sang Alice Cooper's song 'Welcome to My Nightmare', and sang it very badly.

"I know Alice Cooper," I muttered to myself, misquoting something half-remembered, "And you, sir, are no Alice Cooper."

"It's pretty naïf," agreed Jonathan.

Jane shushed us. As the last notes faded away the Ringmaster was left alone in the spotlight. He walked around our enclosure while he talked.

"Welcome, welcome, one and all, to the Theatre of Night's Dreaming," he said.

"Fan of yours," whispered Jonathan.

"I think it's a *Rocky Horror Show* line," I whispered back.

"Tonight you will all be witnesses to monsters undreamed-of, freaks and creatures of the night, to displays of ability to make you shriek with fear - and laugh with joy. We shall travel," he told us, "from room to room - and in each of these subterranean caverns another nightmare, another delight, another display of wonder awaits you! Please - for your own safety - I must reiterate this! - Do not leave the spectating area marked out for you in each room - on pain of doom, bodily

who didn't have one. A small, stocky woman immediately in front of us shook the rain from her umbrella and glowered about her fiercely. "That'd better be gud," she told the young man with her - her son, I suppose. She paid for tickets for both of them.

The vampire woman reached us, recognised Jonathan and said "Is this your party? Four people? Yes? You're on the guest list" which provoked another suspicious stare from the stocky woman.

A recording of a clock ticking began to play. A clock struck twelve (it was barely eight by my watch), and the wooden double-doors at the far end of the room creaked open. "Enter... of your own free will!" boomed a voice, and it laughed maniacally. We walked through the door into darkness.

It smelled of wet bricks and of decay. I knew then where we were: there are networks of old cellars that run beneath some of the overground train tracks - vast, empty, linked rooms of various sizes and shapes. Some of them are used for storage by wine merchants and used-car sellers; some are squatted in, until the lack of light and facilities drives the squatters back into the daylight; most of them stand empty, waiting for the inevitable arrival of the wrecking ball and the open air and the time when all their secrets and mysteries will be no more.

injury, and the loss of your immortal soul! Also, I must stress that the use of flash photography or of any recording devices is *unetely* forbidden."

And with that, several young women holding pencil flashlights led us into the next room.

"No seats then," said Miss Finch, unimpressed.

THE FIRST ROOM

In the first room a smiling blonde woman wearing a spangled bikini, with needle-tracks down her arms, was chained by a hunchback and Uncle Fester to a large wheel.

The wheel spun slowly around, and a fat man in a red Cardinal's costume threw knives at the woman, outlining her body. Then the hunchback blindfolded the cardinal, who threw the last three knives straight and true to outline the woman's head. He removed his blindfold. The woman was untied and lifted down from the wheel. They took a bow. We clapped.

Then the cardinal took a trick knife from his belt and pretended to cut the woman's throat with it. Blood spilled down from the knife-blade. A few members of the audience gasped, and one excitable girl gave a small scream, while her friends giggled.

The cardinal and the spangled woman took their final bow. The lights went down. We followed the flashlights down a back-lined corridor.

THE SECOND ROOM

The smell of damp was worse in here. It smelled like a cellar, musty and forgotten. I could hear somewhere the drip of rain. The Ringmaster introduced The Creature - "Stitched together in the laboratories of the night, the Creature is capable of astonishing feats of strength". The Frankenstein's monster make-up was less than convincing, but The Creature lifted a stone block with fat Uncle Fester sitting on it, and he held back the dune buggy (driven by the vampire woman) at full throttle. For his *pièce de résistance* he blew up a hot water bottle, then popped it.

"Roll on the sash," I muttered to Jonathan.

Miss Finch pointed out, quietly, that in addition to the danger of parasites, it was also the case that

Bluefin Tuna, swordfish and Chitan Seabass were all being overfished and could soon be rendered extinct, since they were not reproducing fast enough to catch up.

THE THIRD ROOM

went up for a long way into the darkness. The original ceiling had been removed at some time in the past, and the new ceiling was the roof of the empty warehouse far above us. The room buzzed at the corners of vision with the blue-purple of ultraviolet light. Teeth and shirts and flecks of lint began to glow in the darkness. A low, throbbing music began. We looked up to see, high above us, a skeleton, an alien, a werewolf and an angel. Their costumes fluoresced in the UV, and they glowed like old dreams high above us, on trapezes. They swung back and forth, in time with the music, and then, as one, they let go and tumbled down toward us.

We gasped, but before they reached us they bounced on the air, and rose up again, like yo-yos, and clambered back on their trapezes. We realised that they were attached to the roof by rubber cords, invisible in the darkness, and they bounced and dove and swam through the air above us while we clapped and gasped and watched them in happy silence.

THE FOURTH ROOM

was little more than a corridor: the ceiling was low, and the Ringmaster strutted into the audience and picked two people out of the crowd - the stocky woman, and a tall black man wearing a sheepskin coat and tan gloves, pulled them up in front of us. He announced that he would be demonstrating his hypnotic powers. He made a couple of passes in the air, and rejected the stocky woman. Then he asked the man to step up onto a box.

"It's a set-up," muttered Jane. "He's a plant."

A guillotine was wheeled on. The ringmaster cut a watermelon in half, to demonstrate how sharp the blade was. Then he made the man put his hand under the guillotine, and dropped the blade. The gloved hand dropped into the basket, and blood spouted from the open cuff.

Miss Finch squeaked.

Then the man picked his hand out of the basket

and chased the Ringmaster around us, while the Benny Hill Show music played.

"Artificial hand," said Jonathan.

"I saw it coming," said Jane.

Miss Finch blew her nose into a tissue. "I think it's all in very questionable taste," she said. Then they led us to

THE FIFTH ROOM

and all the lights went on. There was a makeshift wooden table along one wall, with a young bald man selling beer and orange juice and bottles of water, and signs showed the way to the toilets in the room next door. Jane went to get the drinks, and Jonathan went to use the toilets, which left me to make awkward conversation with Miss Finch.

"So," I said, "I understand you've not been back in England long."

"I've been in Komodo," she told me. "Studying the dragons. Do you know why they grew so big?"

"Er..."

"They adapted to prey upon the pygmy elephants."

"There were pygmy elephants?" I was interested. This was much more fun than being lectured on sushi flukes.

"Oh yes. It's basic island biogeology - animals will naturally tend toward either gigantism or pygmyism. There are equations, you see..." As Miss Finch talked her face became more animated, and I found myself warming to her as she explained why and how some animals grew while others shrank.

Jane brought us our drinks; Jonathan came back from the toilet, cheered and bemused by having been asked to sign autograph while he was passing.

"Tell me," said Jane, "I've been reading a lot of cryptozoological journals for the next of the Guides to the Unexplained I'm doing. As a biologist..."

"Biogeologist," interjected Miss Finch.

"Yes. What do you think the chances are of prehistoric animals being alive today, in secret, unknown to science?"

"It's very unlikely," said Miss Finch, as if she were telling us off. "There is, at any rate, no 'lost world' off on some island, filled with mammoths and smilodons and acpyornis..."

"Sounds a bit rude," said Jonathan. "A what?"

"Acpyornis. A giant flightless prehistoric bird," said Jane.

"I knew that really," he told her.

"Although of course, they're *not* prehistoric," said Miss Finch. "The last Acpyornises were killed off by Portuguese sailors on Madagascar about 300 years ago. And there are fairly reliable accounts of a pygmy mammoth being presented at the Russian court in the sixteenth century, and a band of something which from the descriptions we have were almost definitely some kind of sabre-tooth - the Smilodons - were brought in from North Africa by Vespasian to die in the circus. So these things aren't all prehistoric. Often, they're historic."

"I wonder what the point of the sabre-teeth would be," I said. "You'd think they'd get in the way."

"Nonsense," said Miss Finch. "Smilodon was a most efficient hunter. Must have been - the sabre-teeth are repeated a number of times in the fossil record. I wish with all my heart that there were some left today. But there aren't. We know the world too well."

"It's a big place," said Jane, doubtfully, and then the lights were flickered on and off, and a gladdly disembodied voice told us to walk into the next room, that the latter half of the show was not for the faint of heart, and that later tonight, for one night only, the Circus of Night's Dreaming would be proud to present The Cabinet of Wishes Fulfill'd.

We threw away our plastic glasses, and we shuffled into

THE SIXTH ROOM.

"Presenting," announced the Ringmaster, "The Painmaker!"

The spotlight swung up to reveal an abnormally thin young man in bathing trunks, hanging from hooks through his nipples. Two of the punk girls helped him down to the ground, and handed him his props. He hammered a six-inch nail into his nose, lifted weights with a piercing through his tongue, put several ferrets into his bathing trunks, and, for his final trick, allowed the taller of the punk girls to use his stomach as a dartboard for accurately flung hypodermic needles.

"Wasn't he on the show, years ago?" asked Jane.

"Yeah," said Jonathan. "Really nice guy. He lit a firework held in his teeth."

"I thought you said there were no animals," said Miss Finch. "How do you think those poor ferrets feel about being stuffed into that young man's nether regions?"

"I suppose it depends mostly on whether they're boy ferrets or girl ferrets," said Jonathan, cheerfully.

THE SEVENTH ROOM

contained a rock and roll

comedy act, with some clumsy slapstick. A man's

breasts were revealed, and the hunchback lost his trousers.

THE EIGHTH ROOM

was dark. We waited in the darkness for something to happen. I wanted to sit down. My legs ached, I was tired and cold and I'd had enough.

Then someone started to shine a light at us. We blinked and squinted and covered our eyes.

"Tonight," an odd voice said, cracked and dusty. Not the ringmaster, I was sure of that. "Tonight, one of you shall get a wish. One of you will gain all that you desire, in the Cabinet of Wishes Fulfill'd. Who shall it be?"

"Ooh. At a guess, another plant in the audience," I whispered, remembering the one-handed man in the fourth room.

"Shush," said Jane.

"Who will it be? You sir? You madam?" A figure came out of the darkness and shambled towards us. It was hard to see him properly, for he held a portable spotlight. I wondered if he were wearing some kind of ape costume, for his outline seemed inhuman, and he moved as gorillas move. Perhaps it was the man who played "The

Creature". "Who shall it be, eh?" We squinted at him, edged out of his way.



And then he pounced. "Aha! I think we have our volunteer," he said, leaping over the rope-barrier that separated the audience from the show area around us. Then he grabbed Miss Finch by the hand.

"I really don't think so," said Miss Finch, but she was being dragged away from us, too nervous, too polite, fundamentally too English to make a scene. She was pulled into the darkness, and she was gone to us.

Jonathan swore. "I don't think she's going to let us forget this in a hurry," he said.

The lights went on. A man dressed as a giant fish then proceeded to ride a motorbike around the room several times. Then he stood up on the seat as it went around. Then he sat down and drove the bike up and down the walls of the room, and then he hit a brick and skidded and fell over, and the bike landed on top of him.

The hunchback and the topless nun ran on and pulled the bike off the man in the fish-suit and hauled him away.

"I just broke my sodding leg," he was saying, in a dull, numb voice. "It's sodding broken. My sodding leg," as they carried him out.

"Do you think that was meant to happen," asked a girl in the crowd near to us.

"No," said the man beside her.

Slightly shaken, Uncle Fester and the vampire woman ushered us forward, into

THE NINTH ROOM

where Miss Finch awaited us.

It was a huge room. I knew that, even in the thick darkness. Perhaps the dark intensifies the other senses; perhaps it's simply that we are always processing more information than we imagine. Echoes of our shuffling and coughing came back to us from walls hundreds of feet away.

And then I became convinced, with a certainty

bordering upon madness, that there were great beasts in the darkness, and that they were watching us hungrily.

Slowly the lights came on, and we saw Miss Finch. I wonder to this day where they got the costume.

Her black hair was down. The spectacles were gone. The costume, what little there was of it, fitted her perfectly. She held a spear, and she stared at us without emotion. Then the great cats padded into the light next to her. One of them threw its head back and roared.

Someone began to wail. I could smell the sharp animal stench of urine.

The animals were the size of tigers, but unstriped; they were the colour of a sandy beach at evening. Their eyes were topaz, and their breath smelled of fresh meat and of blood.

I stared at their jaws: the sabre-teeth were indeed teeth, not tusks; huge, overgrown fangs, made for rending, for tearing, for nipping meat from the bone.

The great cats began to pad around us, circling, slowly. We huddled together, closing ranks, each of us remembering in our guts what it was like in the old times, when we hid in our caves when the night came and the beasts went on the prowl; remembering when we were prey.

The smilodons, if that was what they were, seemed uneasy, wary. Their tails switched whiplike from side to side, impatiently. Miss Finch said nothing. She just stared at her animals.

Then the stocky woman raised her umbrella and waved it at one of the great cats. "Keep back, you ugly brute," she told it.

It growled at her, and tensed back, like a cat about to spring.

The stocky woman went pale, but she kept her umbrella pointed out like a sword. She made no move to run, in the torchlit darkness beneath the city.

And then it sprang, batting her to the ground with



Tony

one huge velvet paw. It stood over her, triumphantly, and it roared so deeply that I could feel it in the pit of my stomach. The stocky woman seemed to have passed out, which was, I felt, a mercy: with luck, she would not know when the blade-like fangs tore at her old flesh like twin daggers.

I looked around for some way out, but the other tiger was prowling around us, keeping us herded within the rope enclosure, like frightened sheep.

I could hear Jonathan muttering the same three dirty words, over and over and over.

"We're going to die, aren't we?" I heard myself say.

"I think so," said Jane.

Then Miss Finch pushed her way through the rope barrier, and she took the great cat by the scruff of its neck and pulled it back. It resisted, and she thrucked it on the nose with the end of her spear. Its tail went down between its legs, and it backed away from the fallen woman, cowed and obedient.

There was no blood, that I could see, and I hoped that she was only unconscious.

In the back of the cellar room light was slowly coming up. It seemed as if dawn were breaking. I could see a jungle mist wreathing about huge ferns and hostias; and I could hear, as if from a great way off, the chirp of crickets and the call of strange birds awaking to greet the new day.

And part of me - the writer part of me, the bit that has needed the particular way the light hit the broken glass in the puddle of blood even as I staggered out from a car crash, and has observed in exquisite detail the way that my heart was broken, or did not break, in moments of real, profound, personal tragedy - it was that part of me that thought, "You could get that effect with a smoke machine, some plants and a tape track. You'd need a really good lighting guy of course."

Miss Finch scratched her left breast, unselfconsciously, then she turned her back on us and walked toward the dawn and the jungle underneath the world, flanked by two padding sabretoothed tigers.

A bird screeched and chattered.

Then the dawn light faded back into darkness, and the mists shifted, and the woman and the animals were gone.

The stocky woman's son helped her to her feet. She opened her eyes. She looked shocked but unhurt. And when we knew that she was not hurt, for she picked up her umbrella, and leaned on it, and glared at us all, why then we began to applaud.

No-one came to get us. I could not see Uncle Fester or the vampire woman anywhere. So unescorted we all walked on into

THE TENTH ROOM.

It was all set up for what would obviously have been the grand finale. There were even plastic seats arranged, for us to watch the show. We sat down on the seats and we waited, but nobody from the circus came on, and, it became apparent to us all after some time, no-one was going to come.

People began to shuffle into the next room. I heard a door open, and the noise of traffic and the rain.

I looked at Jane and Jonathan, and we got up and walked out. In the last room was an unmanned table upon which were laid out souvenirs of the circus: posters and CDs and badges, and an open cash-box. Sodium yellow light spilled in from the street outside, through an open door, and the wind gusted at the unsold posters, flapping the corners up and down impotently.

"Should we wait for her?" one of us said, and I wish I could say that it was me. But the others shook their heads, and we walked out into the rain, which had by now subsided to a low and gusty drizzle.

After a short walk down narrow roads, in the rain and the wind, we found our way to the car. I stood on the pavement, waiting the back door to be unlocked to let me in, and over the rain and the noise of the city I thought I heard a tiger, somewhere close by, for there was a low roar that made the whole world shake. But perhaps it was only the passage of a train.



I KNOW
WHO YOU ARE!
TJ HACKETT: FUGED
MERCURY ALIEN
HUNTER!

YOU'VE EARNED A
GREAT REPUTATION, ALTHOUGH
ONE SOMEWHAT **OVERBLOWN**.
JUDGING BY HOW **EASILY** YOU
WAS TRAPPED... AND HOW
VOLUNTARILY YOU'RE
GOING TO DIE!

YOU SHOW NO
FEAR! THAT'S GOOD!
TEACHING FEAR IS SOMETHING
I ENJOY, AND I'M QUITE
GOOD AT IT!

WHAT A TIME
WE'RE GOING
TO HAVE!

HELLRIDERS

BY JOE JUSKO

PART II

YOU'VE BEEN
TEACHING US FOR DAYS
HOW TO BROOD THE GARGO
TRANSPORT WE CONSIDERED SOME
DAYS PAST. YOUR AMBITION WANTS
YOU CARELESS AND COST YOU
YOUR LIFE BUT NOW
ON THAT LAST!

THE WEAPON
IN THAT TULIP IS USED
TO INSURE VICTORY FOR
THE SPARKS. MY SPECIES
HACKETT UNFORTUNATELY
IT IS TOTALLY ARMORED
AND CANNOT BE ACCESSSED
WITHOUT AN ENCRYPTED
CODE.



AND SURE
WONT TELL US
WHAT IT IS!

HACKETT RECOGNIZES
THE BEHIND AND
BATTERED FEMALE AS
THE OTHER RIDER
FROM THE TRANSPORT

THAT'S STILL
ALWAYS BOOBY I'M
GONNA NEED HER TO
OPEN THAT GARGO
WATCH

REASON WITH
HER HACKETT. GET
US THE CODE AND I
PROMISE TO SPARE
YOU BOTH NEEDLESS
KNOW I MAY EVEN
KILL YOU BEFORE
I EAT YOU



HE IS LISTENING!
DON'T LISTEN TO HIM
THEY DON'T JUST KILL
THE DRIVERS. THEIR FOLLO
WERS AREN'T AND ARE
ALWAYS THEY'LL
DO THE BURN
TO GO!

I'LL NEVER
TELL THEM NOW!
THEY WANT
NEVER!

I KNOW THAT GIRL!
JUST BURN UP TIL I CAN
CLEAVE THE CORNERS OUT
OF MY HEAD

SHAME!



SURE!
OKEY NUGGET!
IT'S OBVIOUS YOU'RE
NOT GOING TO BE OF
ANY USE!



ARE
YOU

LOST
YOUR FORTUNE
HEAT?

WELL THEN
LET ME ANSWER YOU
KINDLY!

SO I
CAN GUESS IT
OUT OF YOUR
MOUTH!

AAIEEE!

RRRRRRRRRR

RRRRRRRRRR

ADDICTION!
THE FUDGE THAT
REFRESHES!
DO YOU
FEEL IT HIT
HACKETT?

THE FEAT?

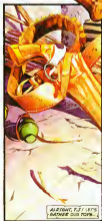
TIME'S UP!
HACK'S WHOLE
TOWN
JOKES!

WELL, SO
MUCH FOR THE
APPETIZER!



IT'S TIME
FOR THE MAIN
COURSE!!







HONG KNOWS BETTER THAN TO ARGUE
WITH HIS MOST PRODUCTIVE THIEF

LATER THAT DAY

THE NEOLORDON
HAS BEEN DELIVERED
MEET ME AT MY
APARTMENT AT TEN
TOMORROW

NOT YOU WILL
BRING IT TO
ME NOW!

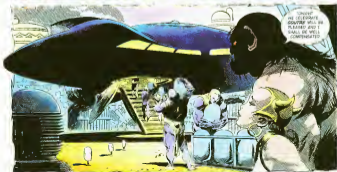
MONEY CAN CAUSE A MAN TO LOSE SOME
OF HIS DIGNITY. HONG MOVES QUICKLY
IF HIS POCKETS CAN BE FILLED

COME LATER
MY MONIES ARE
PAID AND MY JOB
WILL BE DONE

YOU'RE RUINED BY
YOUR BOB AND POSSE
OF MUNDANE PARANORMAL
I'M HERE TO DO BUSINESS
AND NOTHING MORE
SERIOUS

THE NEOLORDON
IS OUTSIDE. MY
MEN ARE
WAITING

HAVE YOUR MEN
MOVE QUICKLY THIS
MORNING BETTER MEET
MY EXPECTATIONS



FLASHBACK TO FRANK: AN ENTERTAINING YOUNG SCIENTIST TURNS AWAY IN A LAB BELONGING TO ANOTHER, THE ENTREPRENEURIAL, SPORT FLYERS EVEN IN THIS STYLISH CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT



THOMPSON HAS REQUESTED TO SEE YOU IMMEDIATELY

MEET ME HERE WOULD BE WANT TO SEE ME?



SEEMS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN PLAYING ON SOMEONE ELSE'S TIME

ALRIGHT JUST LET ME CLEAN UP A FEW THINGS

NO TIME FOR THAT LET'S GO NOW!



COUNTER I'M GOING TO MAKE THIS BRIEF YOU'VE BEEN ASSET TO THIS COMPANY BUT WE DON'T ACCEPT EMPLOYEES WASTING TIME ON UNREALISTIC IDEAS THAT HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS COMPANY'S FOCUS

YOUR ACCUSATIONS ARE EXTRANEOUS. I HAVE SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED EVERY PROJECT THAT HAS BEEN ASSIGNED TO ME WELL AHEAD OF SCHEDULE. I SEE NO HARM IN USING THE EXTRA TIME I HAVE EARNED TO SATISFY MY SCIENTIFIC AMBITIONS



AFTER ALL, MY FINDINGS WILL SECURE THIS CORPORATION'S STANDING AS THE LEADING DEVELOPER OF FUEL TECHNOLOGIES WELL INTO THE NEXT CENTURY



WE HAVE NO ROOM FOR AN EGO LIKE YOURS IN THIS COMPANY. YOU CAN HAVE ALL THE TIME YOU WANT TO DEVELOP YOUR RIDICULOUS THEORIES. YOU'RE FIRED!

IN MIAMI BEACH, FOUNDED THE MOVEMENT, COLTRE QUICKLY ATTRACTED INVESTORS TO PUT EARTH BEHIND HIS IDEAS. HIS STATUS AS AN INTERGALACTICALLY RENOWNED SCIENTIST GREW EXponentially. COLTRE'S ENGINE DEVELOPMENT GREW QUICKLY AS WELL AND BEGAN TO QUICKLY CUT THE COMPETITION, ASSAULTING HIS FORMER EMPLOYERS.



THE TEST RESULTS ARE CONCLUSIVE: YOUR UNSTABLES HAS BEEN PROVEN WITHOUT A DOUBT.

THE ENGINE PROTOTYPE WAS EFFECTIVELY CONSUMED THE NEULOCORON WITH A MINOR LOSS OF ITS INHERENT PROPERTIES.



MAR-KORR, I SEE ARE THE WORKING STILL INTACT?



YES VERY LITTLE HAS BEEN LOST. IN CONSUMING NEULOCORON, THE ENGINE BURNED AN INFINITE WHICH BLUES OVER A LONG BUT UNPREDICTABLE PERIOD OF TIME.

TWO FOUR WORK ON THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN NOTHING SHORT OF BRILLIANT.



THANK YOU. I'LL CONTINUE THESE FINDINGS IN A MATTER OF DAYS.

SAYS A MATTER OF DAYS. ALL MY DREAMS WILL BE REALIZED IN A MATTER OF DAYS.



SEPTEMBER 17TH 2076, AN HISTORIC DAY IN THE ANNALS OF SCIENTIFIC HISTORY.



THE ENTIRE SALARY SHALL KNOW THE NAME COLTRE!

SEPTEMBER 1974. EARLY FIVE YEARS TO THE DAY OF THE MOMENTOUS DISCOVERY, COUNTRY'S MILITARY OWNERS THE ENTIRE ECONOMY OF SOME SMALL PLANETS, AND ADVANCED HELICOPTERS DOMINATE THE CITY SKYLINE.

COUNTRY'S DEVELOPMENTS HAVE ENTIRELY OVERCOME THE PREVIOUS LIMITATIONS OF SPACE TRAVEL. THE NEW ENGINES AND FUEL HAVE MADE POSSIBLE BETWEEN DISTANT PLANETS, AS A RESULT A MODERN INTERGALACTIC ECONOMY EVOLVED.

AS WITH ANY ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY, THERE ARE THOSE WITH DESIRES TO ABUSE IT.

ADVANCED MILITARY POWERS EMBRACED THIS TECHNOLOGY AND APPLIED IT TO BATTLECRUISERS AND FIGHTER CONSTRUCTION. INTERGALACTIC DESIRES TO EXPAND THEIR EMPIRES COULD NOW ACCURSE THE MEANS TO EXERCISE THEIR POTENTIALLY BUTTERFLY ARMBONES.

THE RESULT A VAST AND TERRIBLE POWER IN THE NEED OF A COOPERATED ALLIANCE.

IN RESPONSE TO THIS SITUATION THE JNTF (INTERGALACTIC NEUTRALITY TASK FORCE) WAS CREATED AND PLACED IN CHARGE OF MONITORING THE NEUTRALITY FROM ITS ONLY KNOWN SOURCE THE TWO PLANETS OF ECHOES, HELPING THE IMPERIALISTS AT BAY THE JNTF WOULD LIMIT THE DISTRIBUTION OF NEUTRONIC TO PLANETS USING IT FOR INTER-GALACTIC COMMERCE ONLY.

THE JNTF ALSO WENTED TO LIMIT THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ENGINES THAT UTILIZE THE NEUTRONIC COURSE AS THE SOLE MANUFACTURER OF THESE ENGINES WAS IN AN UNFAVORABLE POSITION.

IT IS AGREED YOU SHALL LIMIT THE PRODUCTION OF YOUR ENGINES TO 800,000 UNITS PER YEAR AND SELL THEM ONLY TO THE JNTF.

THE ENGINES WILL BE USED ONLY IN COMMERCE SHIPS AND OFFICIAL JNTF PROTECTION VESSELS.

FOR THIS YOU SHALL BE PAID 20 TIMES THE CURRENT VALUE OF EACH ENGINE.

YOUR REVENUE WILL NOT DECREASE EVEN THOUGH YOU ARE PRODUCING LESS UNITS.

I DON'T HAVE A CHOICE DO I?

NO ONE, YOU DO NOT.

IT WAS THE ONLY SOLUTION TO KEEP THE PEACE.

BACK TO THE PRESENT: THE SUCCESSFUL
TRIO BELIEVE IN ONE OF THEIR FAVORITE
CANTHONS: COSMOPOLITAN IS THE OPERATIVE
HUB TO DISRUPT THE CUBESILE











ALISON GROSS

©CHARLES VESS-98



O Alison Gross that lives in yon tower,
The ugliest witch in the north country,
Has trysted me one day up to her bower,
And many fair speeches she made to me.





She stroked my head and she combed my hair,
And she set me down softly on her knee,
Says, 'If you will be my sweetheart so true,
So many fine things I will give to thee.'

She showed me a mantle of red scarlet,
With golden flowers and fringes fine;
Says, 'If you will be my sweetheart so true,
This goodly gift it shall be thine.'

'Away, away you ugly witch,
Hold far away and let me be!
I never will be your sweetheart so true,
And I wish I were out of your company.'



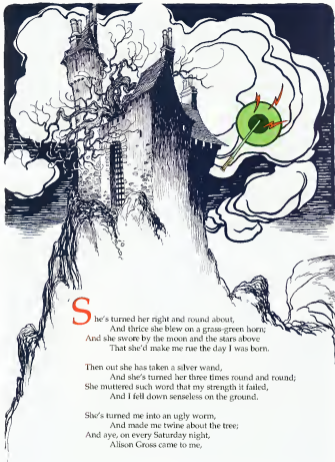


She next brought a shirt of the softest silk,
Well wrought with pearls about the band;
Says, 'If you will be my sweetheart so true,
This goodly gift you shall command.'

She showed me a cup of the good red gold,
We'll set with jewels so fair to see;
Says, 'If you will be my sweetheart so true,
This goodly gift I will give to thee.'

'Away, away, you ugly old witch,
Hold far away and let me be!
I would not once kiss your ugly mouth,
For all the gold in the north country.'





She's turned her right and round about,
And thrice she blew on a grass-green horn;
And she swore by the moon and the stars above
That she'd make me rue the day I was born.

Then out she has taken a silver wand,
And she's turned her three times round and round;
She muttered such word that my strength it failed,
And I fell down senseless on the ground.

She's turned me into an ugly worm,
And made me twine about the tree;
And aye, on every Saturday night,
Allison Gross came to me,





With silver basin and silver comb,
To comb my headie upon her knee;
But before I'd kiss her ugly mouth,
I'd sooner twine about the tree.

But as it fell out, on last Hallowe'en,
When the Fairy Court came riding by,
The Queen lighted down on a flowery bank,
Close by the tree where I want to be.

She took me up in her milk-white hand,
And she's stroked me three times over her knee;
She changed me again to my proper shape,
And no more I twine about the tree.





Zombie Lover

An excerpt by
Piers Anthony
Art by Darrell K. Sweet

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Breanna felt fortunate. It was partly her appearance, which was filling out nicely, she had lustrous black hair to her waist, and glowing green eyes. Her dark skin fairly shone. That was because she was a bright, friendly girl of the Black Wave, and proud of her heritage. She would really be something, she thought, when she finally turned sixteen.

She turned away from the mirror pond and looked for a blackberry pie to eat before dawn. And that was the main thing: alone among the teens of her village, she had a magic talent. Normally only a baby delivered in Xanth had magic, but she was special. She blessed the day she had discovered it, for it had changed her life. She had come to the Land of Xanth with her Wave six years ago when she was nine, and thought she would never have magic. How wonderfully wrong that had turned out to be!

Her talent was to see in darkness. That was why she now went about by night, and slept during the day. It was just so much more interesting at night, when other human folk were sleeping, and the weird creatures of darkness were abroad.

Oh, yes, there was danger. But she had obtained a safety spell that warned her of any direct threat to her tender flesh, and that was enough. She hoped. She hadn't renewed it recently, so the spell might be fading. She had to move quickly and silently and lose herself in the night, fending most monsters. She also had a sharp dagger, which she hoped she would never have to use, in other than a threat. Meanwhile the lore of the mysteries of darkness drew her to ever farther explorations.

There were no pie trees close by, but she did spy a tan bush. Tanb were a bit sharp on the tongue, but would do. She picked a black raspberry, tinted and bit into it, and it was fine. She found a coffee tree with a cup of black coffee, and that was fine too. At home she wasn't allowed to drink coffee, yet, but that was yet another adventure of going out on her own: no one told her what not to do. Her folks were so dull, that they could see only mundane things, despite living in a magic realm now. They would need special magic glasses to see most of the magic of Xanth.

Breanna really didn't miss Mundania. Xanth was so much more interesting. Oh, there were dangers, but they were mostly magical, instead of dreary things like rubbers and drunk drivers. She might have liked to have some chewing gum, but here it was as apt to chew the person as to be chewed.

She saw what looked like a barnster bloom. Maybe if she wore its flower, it would enable her to argue her case better at home. It had a nice dairy-like flower. But as she touched it, something awkward happened. She jumped back. Oh, now she saw that it was a different plant, a hare aster. She wouldn't want to wear one of those flowers.

She came to a river that seemed a bit too wide and deep to wade across. Fortunately there were big banana plants, or plantains, growing by its banks, with the biggest fronds she had seen. Magic could be very good for plants. So she grabbed onto an old plantain and managed to haul it down. She wedged it open and scooped out the remains of its pulp. Now she had a banana boat. She used an old stem as a paddle, and moved across the water.

Another craft came floating down the stream. It was small, and had two hulls, and several cats were on it. Oh—a catamaran. It figured. It had a sail, but one cat was loudly shrieking it with its claws. Then the cat spat Breanna, and dove down out of sight, terrified. That one would be called Fray D. Cat, she was sure.

She landed, and saw a big dog house with a small pup tent beside it. That too figured: big dog, little dog. Things tended to be literal in Xanth.

She saw a bright rift forming in the east, and realized that it was the first crack of dawn. Night was over, and soon light would spill through the crack, and irradiate the region, flooding it with day. So it was time for her to sleep. She loved her talent, but it did have the small disadvantage of making daylight uncomfortably bright for her. She accustomed when she had in, but preferred not to bother. Also, she got tired after being active all night. So now she simply slept in the daytime, when away from home.

Unfortunately she wasn't sleepy yet. Oh—because of that coffee. She should have remembered that it had a mild wake-up spell

that was stronger folks didn't let her drink it: they said she was *enough* to be drunk by day, and they didn't need to have her agree by night too. How little did they know? But though she hated to admit it, there was: would have helped her in this case. How could she get her rest?

She looked around. She saw a large dried fish mounted on a pole. Birds were coming in to sit on it. That was a perch, it was a favorite resting place for birds. But she was no bird.

There was a construction, and several small metallic objects ran by. They looked like keys for doors, still new and shiny. Oh—those would be latchkey kids, running home. As she herself should be doing, if she weren't too busy to give up her adventure. She saw them charge up to a big black marked writer. What were they doing around a writer's block? They clumped up on top of it, where there was a board. They settled down comfortably on that board, each little key evidently having its own spot. When every key was in place, the block ran down wooden pegs and walked away.

"Oh, I get it," Breanna said. "The key board unlocks the writer's block." But her problem wasn't being blocked, but needing to get some sleep.

She saw a spreading tree whose branches might offer a decent place to be. But then she recognized it as a sycamore, and the last thing she wanted was to get more and more sick.

Then she remembered something she had seen nearby: dark glasses. They were supposed to have a spell to put folk to sleep. So she walked back in the spectacular bush she had passed recently and checked it over. Sure enough, one of its offerings was a handsome dark pair. And, conveniently close, was an open shelter with what looked like a comfortable bed under a pleasant canopy. Nobody was using it, so she would borrow it for a few hours.

She lay down on the bed, put on the dark glasses, and closed her eyes. Immediately she felt the magic taking hold, and sank into a lovely dark slumber. Suddenly Breanna couldn't breathe: something was covering her mouth and squashing her nose. She struggled, reaching wildly with her arms—and discovered that a head was resting on her face. It was a man. In fact, he was kissing her! She grabbed him by the ears and heaved them off her innocent lips. She tried to scream, but first had to inhale, and at the time it took to do that she was sitting up so violently that her dark glasses fell off. Blinding day assaulted her eyes, and she had to squint them tightly closed. When she shut her eyes, her mouth shut too, stifling her scream. She had never thought to practice screaming with her eyes closed.

By then she realized that maybe a scream was not in order. Who was this man who had taken such advantage of her? It might be better to find out before she took further action. After all, men did have their points, and it behooved a girl not to throw them away carelessly.

She squinted, letting only a little light in. The man was snoring there, a somewhat hairy outline. He didn't look dangerous at the moment. "Who are you?" she demanded. "Why did you molest me?"

"I am King Xeth," he replied in a somewhat scratchy voice. "I loved you *awake*."

"I know that! What made you think I didn't want to sleep in peace?" She was irritable, because of her rude awakening from slumber. Her systems were not yet back on track.

"You are in the *Paradise of Love*," his speech was slightly slurred, but she could make it out. Her vision was improving as her eyes accustomed to the daylight.

"The what?"

He pointed to a sign beside the bed. It said *paradise of love*. Breanna drew a blank. "What's that?"

"When a woman wants to marry, she sleeps in the *Paradise of Love*," he explained. "Only a man of good appearance, character, and breeding can enter. If he chooses her, he kisses her *awake*." I was so glad to find a sleeping beauty instead of a sleeping bag.

Things were beginning to come together, but not in a way that reassured her. "But I'm not ready to marry anyone!" she protested. "I'm only fifteen."

"I'm thirty," he responded. "I love your lustrous black hair and

"Jawing mean eyes. I am sure you will make a good wife." Briciana realized that she had blundered into a marriage. "It may be a mistake. I don't see the sign. I was protesting. I can't marry you." She got out of the bed and began sliding away.

"I will study you and make you queen of the zombies," he said. "You are young and healthy and fully alive, so it will be a long time before you rot."

Briciana wanted nothing so much as to get well away from here, but this made her pause involuntarily. "Queen of what?"

"The zombies. We felt it was time to have our own kingdom, so we held an election, and the healthiest zombie won. Me. But it is a condition of kingship that I marry, so as to savor the variable heat and continue the line. That's why I came here, to find a wife."

"You-you're a zombie?" she asked, newly appalled. Her hand came up to wipe frantically at her mouth. Her lips didn't feel even better, but she wanted to wash them ten times as thoroughly as possible. Was it contagious?

"Yes, of course. How else could I be king of the zombies?"

"This is absolutely impossible!"

"By no means. My mother is Zora Zombite, who married the living man Xavier forty years ago. It took them a while to savor the stark, because not all of her necessary undead were healthy, but—"

"I don't want to hear it!" Briciana shrieked. Actually she had not meant that she despised him to be a zombie, she could now see that there were some sagging places on him, ancient flesh rot, and the reason for his shivering was, apparently, a thrifty turgue. She had meant that it was impossible for her to marry him. She wasn't ready to marry anyone, least of all a zombie.

"There is no need for you to hear it, if it bores you," Xoth said easily. "Come with me now to Cade Zombite, where the wedding will be organized. You will want to meet your new subjects."

"No! I won't," she cried. "I won't marry you! I'm just a girl. A living girl. I'm getting out of here!" Now at last she voiced action to word, and charged out of the pavilion.

"But it has been decided," he protested. "You slept here. I kissed you. All the zombie women will be jealous of your husband long hair and firm flesh."

"Let them be jealous of something else!" she flung back. "Find another girl! His wife will come to sleep in the pavilion soon. I'm gone!" She dodged behind a leafy tree and kept going.

"No, you are the one," Xoth called after her. "I loved you the moment I entered the pavilion, so its magic declares. I love your burned black color, I love your high emotion."

She was running, but not out of range of his voice. "What do you know of my emotion?"

"That is my talent: read! I may judge the details somewhat, but the power of your emotion comes through delightfully. I can tell that you have very strong feelings for me."

"That's because I loathe the very notion of being close to you!" she shot back.

"Yes, you love the notion of being close to me," he agreed. "It will be a perfect marriage."

She suspected that there was a lot of rot in his ear, too, but she didn't stay to argue the case. She tried to sneak behind a small leafy tree, but he still pursued her. Why didn't you marry a nice zombie girl?" she demanded over her shoulder.

Because they are all too rotten," he said with considerable accuracy. "While that is no fault ordinarily, it is a fact that the works don't like to deliver babies in zombie women. That's why it took ten years to persuade the stark to deliver me to my mother. So I need a living woman, just as my mother needed a living man. You are just perfect."

He had given her much too good an answer. She would not refute it logically. So she tried to deny emotionally. "I'm not perfect! I'm too young and immature and already to write down. I don't love you."

You will surely grow older and more mature, and learn to settle down. You will be a fine inspiration for our corps d'esprit, our undead army. And I know where there is a fine live spring. The one where my mother learned to love my father."

He was still not arguing. But it felt like something she detested worse than a zombie, it was a great zombie. So she let fly with the truth. "I don't want to marry anyone!" Then she ran as fast as her healthy living legs could propel her, and soon left him out of sight and hearing.

Soon she got smart. She knew he would follow, so she couldn't rest until she was so far away he would never find her. After that, she would figure out what else to do.

She slowed, so as to let some of her breath catch up with her, and picked her way carefully, so as to leave no obvious trail. When she came to a stream, she waded through it, putting only to wash her fouled mouth out several times. She followed it upstream, then followed a dragon trail for several paces, before doubling back and wading farther upstream. If the zombie thought she had gone that way, he would encounter the dragon. She wasn't sure how dragons felt about zombies, but at least it would be a distraction. At last she spied a branch hanging over the water. She reached up to catch it, and hauled herself up and onto the tree. She made her way to a branch on the opposite side, and dropped off into a gully that led away from the stream. It should be just about impossible to track her this far.

But just to be sure, she climbed another tree and hid herself carefully amidst its thick foliage. She would wait here until the end of the day, very quietly.

She was tired, after all that fleeing. She took a good grip on the branches, and relaxed, physically. She was so excited and horrified to relax mentally. She let her ears be her eyes, listening for any inward sound.

All too soon it came: the clatter, crashing noise of a zombie in a hurry. She peered out between the leaves, just to be sure. Yes, it was a zombie, not Xoth, but another one, somewhat farther gone. He was headed in her direction.

How could he know? He wasn't even following her trail! What gave her location away?

Briciana decided to find out. She knew that the average zombie wasn't phenomenally smart, because its brain was rotten. "How did you know where I am?" she called.

"Wee can feel your magic," it answered. It was not able to speak as well as Xoth, being farther gone. "Wee are still looking."

"You can feel my magic? What magic?"

"Your magic talent."

Briciana waited no more, the thing was getting too close. She leaped out of her tree, dropped to the ground, and set off running again. Now she knew two things: they could feel her magic, and there were many zombies out looking for her. Maybe that wasn't surprising, since Xoth was a zombie king. Maybe they cast about actively—

that wasn't hard for a zombie to do—until one of them happened to catch within sensing range of her. Then he oriented on her magic. She saw another zombie ahead of her. She dropped to the side, but found the way blocked by a live-sized object. She recognized it: a potato-gone. Anything that touched it would be gone, nobody knew when, and she didn't want to risk it. So she slowed, and stepped very carefully around it.

The zombie behind her was less careful. It blundered right into the potato-gone and suddenly was gone. That was a relief!

But now Briciana had blundered herself into a hog. She was in danger of getting her black shoes all gunky. So she had to pick her way through it, going from hummock to hummock.

There was a huge fat monster Briciana squished to a stop, concerned about just how dangerous it might be. So she asked it.

"What are you?"

The monster opened its ponderous and mottled mouth and spewed forth an answer. "I'm a happy cat."

"Are you dangerous?"

"No. I am a harmless, friendly lovable cuddly creature."

But Briciana had no intention that all was not quite right. This she made the conclusion: hypocrite. One who said one thing but did another. She couldn't trust it.

But maybe she could use it. "Well, there's a really lovely morsel of

along following it," she said, sitting around the creature. "Too bad you're so friendly and harmless because he would have made a nice meal for you." She found herself frowning beyond a burrow, and was surprised that she could make a good run for it if she had to.

"Too bad," the hippo agreed, and shifted its bulk to block the passage of the next person passing this way.

She moved quickly on. She was getting tired, and hungry, but all she saw was short sheltering, and she knew better than to eat any of that. She didn't want to be any shorter than she was. She would avoid lightning too, neither food appealed to her. Then she spied a variety of peacocks bearing about dance those were tasteless, boring punnies, but she was used to them from her own time in Mundania, so could handle it. She pecked several and chewed on them as she went.

Where could she go where the zombies could not? Her mind was blank. So Brenna just kept running, fearing that wherever she stopped, a zombie would close in on her. What an awful mess she had gotten herself into! All because of that inviting bed in the pavilion.

She was getting hot as well as tired. The sun was glaring. "I know I was stupid!" she yelled at it. Mortified by her admission, the sun ceased its glare.

She came across a small village marked Norfolk. Maybe someone here would help her. "Hey, can you block off zombies?" she called to the nearest man, who was digging in a garden.

He paid no attention. Irritated, Brenna ran on to where a woman was washing clothing in a stream. "Can you help me?" she asked. But the woman didn't even glance at her.

She came to the far edge of the village. The sign there said You are now leaving IgNorthfolk. Good guidance to you.

Oh, that was why they had ignored her! She must have entered the first sign.

A side path caught up with her. The only way to get rid of one of those was to slow down until it crossed on ahead, for they were speedy things. When she slowed, Brenna's mind began to work a bit better. She got an idea: maybe the zombies couldn't go into the Region of Madness. She could maybe hide there, it wasn't far away. That was fortunate, because she was getting too tired to continue much longer.

There was a small patch of it north of the Gap Chosen, though its main mass was south. That little patch should be plenty. But what was the fastest way to it? She wasn't sure, and didn't have much time. But she saw a fully living man walking along, so she approached him. "He! I'm Brenna of the Black Wave."

He shook her hand. "I am Aylm. I absorb one property of anything I touch." His skin turned dark, like hers.

She wasn't certain whether he would be pleased or annoyed, so she didn't mention it. "I'm looking for the Region of Madness. I know it's close by, but—"

"I don't want to go anywhere near that!" he exclaimed. "It would make me mad." He hurried away.

That wasn't much help. But she saw another man, so approached him similarly. "Hi, I'm Brenna. My talent is to see in blackness."

"I am Tyler. I have a different talent each day."

She was impressed. "That must be some fun."

"No it isn't, because I can't choose them and they are small. Today I have the talent of growing warts on little toes. Do you want a wart?"

Brenna's toes cramped. "No thanks! I want to find the Region of Madness. Do you—"

"Right that way," he said, pointing.

She changed course, and walked swiftly toward the nearest loop of madness. She knew its nature, because her girlish curiosity had led her to explore some of its fringes. It was really weird there, and she didn't care to get far into it. But maybe it would be some for the zombies then for her. She hoped.

She spied a man walking the opposite way. He looked rather dazed. Beside him was an old small white dog who seemed less confused. The dog pawed as they came together, looking up at her, showing a black left ear and a curled furry tail.

"You look Madame," Brenna said. "Hi, I'm Brenna."

The man, who was aware of her. "I'm William Henry Taylor, and this is my dog's dog, 'Purpy.' I don't know what I'm doing here. I was just so sick, but so long, and suddenly everything changed."

"I know how it is," Brenna said. "But I guess if Purpy found your way out of the madness, he knows where you're going. So maybe you should keep going that way."

"I suppose so," he agreed. "I hope my daughter is all right." They went on.

Brenna felt a bit guilty for not trying to help him more, but she was afraid the zombies would catch up with her at any time, while they wouldn't bother Mr. Taylor.

She saw a tagged doll. But then it moved, startling her. "You're alive!"

Not exactly. I'm Ricky. I'm a ghost."

"Oh, a doll who has been animated."

"More or less." He moved on before she could ask him to verify that she was going the right way to overtake the madness. But she was pretty sure she was close; the scenery was beginning to think about looking weird, and she had been meeting weird people.

She came to the fringe and plunged in. The wilderness closed in, and for once she welcomed it. Let the zombies try to catch on her again, when it was overriden by the magic ambience of this section.

Then, halfway acrossed that she just might maybe be safe, she dropped to the ground and rested. She was so tired that she fell almost immediately into a daze.

"Why child! whatever is the matter?"

Brenna looked up. There was Day Marc Inbri, her friend. Inbri had once been a night mare, but had gotten half a soul and turned too nice to handle the night job. Now she had become a true nymph, and kept nice company with a true lion. She was pure black, that was what had first attracted Brenna. When could be finer than a black mare?

"Oh, Inbri! I'm in trouble."

Inbri formed a drowsy image of a pretty black young woman in a lovely black gown. She always knew how to relate. "I can tell that, dear. I felt your emotion from afar. What trouble?"

"I did something ever so stupid," Brenna wailed. "I slept in the Pavilion of Love, and a zombie king loved me. Now he wants to marry me."

"But didn't you see the sign?"

"I came to the bed just before dawn, from the other direction. I wasn't looking for my sign. I had been exploring all night, using my talent—and now the zombies are orienting on it to find me." That gave her an idea. "Say, maybe if I got rid of the talent, Zach wouldn't be able to find me!"

"But you can't do that," Inbri protested.

Still, Brenna had held of a desperate notion. "I love my talent, but I have being abused by zombies. If that's the price of my freedom, well maybe it's a necessary sacrifice. Can you take my talent and put it back where you found it?" For that was how she had come by it. Brenna had been born (not delivered) Mundane, and come to the land of Xanth with her Wave. No Mundane had magic. But the day music had befriended her, and given her the talent she had found, and they had been friends ever since, all six months. So she was the only original Black Wave to have magic. The children who had been delivered (not born) since then did have black magic talents, but none of them were over six years old.

Inbri shook her head. "No, I can't do that. You had better go to the Good Magic clan for an answer."

But he charges a year's service for an answer—and often it's so cryptic that it doesn't do much good anyway. It's too young to suffer through that.

Nevertheless, I think it is your best chance."

"He'll probably just tell me to accept my fate."

If he does, it will surely be the correct course."

But I'm desperate! If that zombie catches me, he'll marry me and make me queen of the zombies—and I'm only fifteen! It's a fate

"worse than death." That was ironic, for zombies were made from dead people. Death was bad enough, but to be left going about after death was surely worse. And to have to surround the work with a zombie, *against* it? She'd rather be carried by a were-wolf or sucked by a vampire any day.

"I know this is awful," Imrii said. "But I can't take your talent back."

"Why not? I'm originally Mundane. The magic can't stick to me very closely."

"I am not free to explain."

"But the zombies are after me!"

Imrii sighed. "I know, dear, and it's indeed awful. I am not saying that I don't want to help you. I am saying that I can't—and I can't tell you why."

Breanna began to cry. She was ashamed of herself for doing it but just got overwhelmed.

Imrii was just as sensitive to that as a man would have been, to the girl's surprise. "Maybe I can compromise."

Breanna brightened. "You can?"

"I will tell you what I can't tell you: in a dream—but then I must take back the dream. So you will not remember it."

"But how can that help me?"

"I can explain everything, in the dream, so you understand. When you do, and agree that you need to ask the Good Magician, you will wake from the dream and remember only that when you knew the whole story, you agreed. Then you will be willing to do it, and know that I can't help you, though I want to."

This was almost as weird as the madness. But what did she have to lose? "What if I don't agree?" she demanded.

"That would be dangerous."

Wonder yet, Breanna knew Imrii was her friend, and trusted her. So there had to be something. But whatever could it be? "Okay. Give me the dream."

"First I will rehearse the sequence as you experienced it. Then I will fill in the parts you did not see."

"Okay." Breanna was really curious now.

The forest faded, to be replaced by a scene from Breanna's memory. There she was, walking out from the Black Village, perturbed about the unreasonable restrictions her Mundaneish parents still put on her. Here she was, just fifteen, and still not allowed to date a boy and close the door. Or to wander out into the distant forest alone. They still treated her like a child.

She wished she could go far away, and have some fabulous adventure, free from parental restriction. Maybe even visit the vire, and see the sea. She had heard of a city there called Aulie, where ride creatures reigned. "Aulie be the day!" in any expression of ambition. She'd love to tell off those creatures of Sea Aulie. She'd like to eat a sea-mart, and see whether it really stuck the mouth tight shut.

She started to get angry. Why couldn't she go and do these things? What right did anybody have to tell her no? It made her so bloody mad!

She realized she was on a special path, with another path emerging. Oh—she had blundered onto a cross walk. No wonder she had gotten so suddenly cross. She stepped off it, and her temper subsided. Still, she felt that some of her ire was justified. It was high time that the Black Village started spreading out and interacting more with the rest of this magic land, which really had so much to offer.

Then she saw the beautiful black horse. "Oh, you lovely creature!" she breathed.

Mare Imrii's head turned. "You can see me?" she asked in a dreamlet.

"Of course I can see you! You're pure black. You're the prettiest horse I ever saw. May I pat you?"

"I suppose, if you want to?" Imrii was plainly taken aback. Breanna approached. She patted the mare on the shoulder. "I didn't even know there were horses in Xanth," she said. "Or are you a unicorn, with your horn hidden?"

"I'm a—well, it is complicated."

"Oh, tell me!" Breanna pleaded.

"I was a right mare for two hundred years, then a day mare, and now I'm a tree nymph, but I can assume my old form when I want, and be solid, and magical, and dreamy. My tree gives me that power. I forgot I was magic, that's why I thought you couldn't see me."

Breanna was intrigued. "Did you have a right idea?"

"Not yet. But maybe now that I'm solid, it will happen. I would settle for whatever I could get."

They talked, and soon Breanna told Imrii all about herself, too. Then they parted, but agreed to meet again, for they liked each other. It seemed that girls and horses were attracted to each other just as strongly in Xanth as in Mundania.

A week later Mare Imrii asked Breanna if she would like a magic talent. "Oh, yes, I'd love it!" Breanna exclaimed, liking this mental game.

"If you could have any talent you wanted, what would it be?"

Breanna thought for a long time—at least a minute. "Not a big one, not a small one. One that's me. Only I don't know me well enough yet."

"What about the ability to conjure any kind of seed?"

"I suppose that's okay, but I'm no gardener. I'd rather change the world."

"Or perhaps the ability to choose the breed of your future children."

"Future children! I'm only fifteen. I don't want to even think of having children until I'm an ancient old woman of twenty five."

"What about transformation of the inanimate?"

"I already have enough trouble with living things. Why should I want to mess with dead things?"

"Then maybe the power to create a small void?"

That was tempting. "Like the big void, only under my control?" But in half a moment she reconsidered. "No, it would be too dangerous. I might forget and sit in it, and be half-dead."

Mare Imrii considered. "How about the ability to project a spot on a wall?"

"A black-spot? Maybe, but spot-on-the-wall talents are a dime a dozen."

"This is a special spot. It's actually a petal, it grows with time, getting larger and more detailed, until it is a very nice image."

"Maybe so, but is not me."

"Hearing from a distance?"

"That's not me either."

"Then perhaps the ability to conjure a gremlin at any spot?"

That was intriguing. But a moment's thought dampened it. "Sall not me. What would I do with all that spouting water?"

Imrii shook her tail. One might almost suspect she was becoming a smuggen impatient. "What would you consider to be *you*?"

Breanna had worked out her answer. "To see in blackness. That would be ideal."

"I think I have found a talent like that. I want you to have it."

Breanna laughed. "But talents don't just lie around waiting for folk to take them! You have to be born—I mean, defined with them."

"There are many kinds of magic in Xanth. Come with me, but don't tell anyone what you see."

"I promise," Breanna agreed ungrudging. Of course she couldn't get any magic talent, but just imagining it was fun.

"You will have to ride me," Imrii said. "It's some distance."

Breanna was delighted by the prospect. "Okay. But though I love horses—especially black ones—I'm not an experienced rider."

"There will be no problem."

So Breanna climbed onto Mare Imrii's back, and the horse took off. She galloped somewhat faster than the wind, seeming to pass right through trees, and the girl was utterly at ease, not even close to falling off. That was part of the magic of it. Sometimes they even seemed to be flying through the air.